

Vote for women who pack a presidential punch

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By Robin Smith Kollman

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Imagine political heavy hitters U.S. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice appearing on the same ballot for president.

Now picture choosing between House Democratic Whip Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California or former Transportation and Labor Secretary Elizabeth Dole for the nation's top elected slot. Ten women, most holding an elected office, are up for a special "Top of the Ticket" presidential bid at the Web site www.thewhitehouseproject.org <<http://www.thewhitehouseproject.org>>. To vote, log onto the site and select any two candidates and wait for the November results for the imaginary election.

A confidential committee of political powerhouses selected "viable" female candidates who could run in the 2004 presidential election or be considered in a future bid, said Marie C. Wilson, president of The White House Project, which sponsors the Web site. The White House Project is a New York-based, non-partisan organization created to advance women's leadership throughout the country.

"It was a huge list," Wilson said, adding that it was narrowed to include U.S. Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas), Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), along with U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), Maryland Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christine Todd Whitman.

"We were looking at women who are viable, who have the qualifications to run for president," said Wilson. "Women who would bring something to the table: relationships, resources."

With two previous online ballots promoting women for presidential and vice presidential selection, this is the first White House Project ballot with candidates firmly entrenched in the political system. Previous ballots included women who had business, academic or some political experience.

While Illinois lacks representation in the Top Ten list, Wilson said U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Evanston) could be on future ballots. Schakowsky "calls it like it is and addresses issues," Wilson said, forcing the media to report on topics instead of writing about female politicians' "hair, hemlines and husbands."

Electing a woman president may be years away, but Wilson says getting people to discuss the possibility helps it become more commonplace.

"The more people talk about it, the more routine it is to have people talk about women for president," she said. "The more people talk about it, then the more normal it all becomes, the more it becomes a part of our culture."